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SUBJECT: ISRAEL WANTS GREATER BMENA ROLE

REF: (A) STATE 82753 (B) Tel AVIV 1837

¶1. (SBU) ESTH officer met with MFA Magreb Director Eynat Shlein-Michael on September 3 to follow up at her request on the BMENA demarche presented August 18 (ref A). She underscored that Israel remains quite interested in BMENA progress, and she personally believed it was one of the Bush administration's best initiatives. Shlein-Michael is the MFA point person on BMENA, and offered a more detailed response than offered ref B. She followed BMENA progress closely during her recent three-year posting in Washington.

¶2. (SBU) The chief reaction of the GOI is that Israel would like to be included in BMENA as a regular participant and invitee. The GOI understood that, at the start of the Initiative, there was logic in not including Israel so as not to politicize the forum into an anti-Israel opportunity, or discourage the Arab states from joining it. Shlein-Michael believes the BMENA process is now sufficiently entrenched and partner countries sufficiently engaged with it to tolerate Israeli participation. Israel is a regional country with an interest in BMENA's progress. Israel brings to BMENA expertise in development technologies, civil society and democracy building, and women's rights. Israel sees itself as a donor/contributor to the process. She pointed out also that Israel has worked with developing states in the Arabic-speaking world for 60 years through its Mashav program (Israel's development cooperation agency). Israel's presence in other IOs and forums has not made them less effective, and the workshops planned for BMENA members this autumn are the sort to which Israel could bring good value-added. Finally, she noted that including Israel in BMENA is the type of positive engagement that President Obama spoke of in his Cairo address; keeping Israel out of a regional forum where productive relations are fostered would be inconsistent with his stated, broader objectives in the Middle East, such as normalizing Israel's relations with its neighbors.

¶3. (SBU) Emboff promised to convey Israel's interest to Washington BMENA organizers, and reiterated USG commitment to keep Israel apprised of BMENA developments.

CUNNINGHAM